



PRESS RELEASE

House National Security Committee

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STATEMENT OF HONORABLE FLOYD D. SPENCE (R-SC)

OPEN HEARING ON U.S. DEFENSE POSTURE FROM REGIONAL U.S. COMMANDERS IN CHIEF

March 6, 1997

Today the committee will hear from three of our regional CINCs. The annual reports by our regional CINCs are especially useful for helping to understand threats to U.S. national security interests and the condition of U.S. forces around the world. I am glad that we have our three witnesses this morning, for their missions and their forces reflect many of the challenges that the Department of Defense faces today.

On the left facing me is General John Tilelli, commander in chief of U.S. Forces Korea. Every morning he awakes to contemplate the very real prospect of a major regional war. Just a few dozen kilometers from his headquarters is the front line in the last Cold-War standoff, and the forward echelon of the million-man North Korean army. This army is amply equipped with artillery, the world's largest force of special operations troops, ballistic missiles and almost certainly possesses nuclear weapons. The North Korean military is not well trained, in the Western sense, and has questionable logistics capabilities. However, it serves a highly unstable leadership. The collapse of North Korea has been predicted for years now, yet no one can say with certainty whether reunification will come with a bang or a whimper.

In short, North Korea represents a real and present danger.

Next to General Tilelli sits Admiral Joseph Prueher, commander-in-chief of U.S. Pacific Command. The admiral's situation is different from General Tilelli's, although they share the same theater and threat. The United States is the predominant power in the Pacific, and outside of Korea, the region is relatively stable, although dynamic East Asian economies ensure national competition and perhaps uncertainty. The U.S. Seventh Fleet is a force and a presence in the region on behalf of both U.S. interests and regional stability.

Yet over the horizon, Admiral Prueher must worry about a long-term challenge that could make North Korea pale by comparison – China. While no one is ready yet to declare China an imminent threat to U.S. national security interests, there are troubling signs. Just a year ago, China attempted to intimidate Taiwan by a series of aggressive exercises designed to interfere in Taiwan's emerging democracy. When the United States became involved, Chinese military figures made nuclear threats against the U.S. homeland. China is increasing its arms purchases from Russia, in a clear attempt to acquire capabilities that will ultimately and inevitably complicate Admiral Prueher's mission.

Admiral Prueher also must worry about a China in the throes of a change in leadership. With the death of Deng Xiaoping, a new generation of leaders will struggle to establish themselves. With communist ideology losing its appeal, many of these leaders are increasingly turning to an assertive form of nationalism. In time, if Chinese economic growth and military modernization continues as projected, one of Admiral Prueher's successors will face a monumental challenge in a critical region of the world.

Finally, to the right, we have General Jack Sheehan, commander-in-chief of U.S. Atlantic Command. Not only is he a regional CINC, but he is the primary provider of stateside forces to other theater commanders. If General Tilelli faces a current regional threat, and Admiral Prueher faces a potential superpower competitor, General Sheehan faces two other post-Cold-War problems: in Haiti, General Sheehan is currently involved in an ongoing contingency mission that is taking longer to resolve than anticipated, and he must supply forces for other worldwide contingencies that are sapping U.S. capabilities for fighting major wars.

In his area of operations, General Sheehan must keep continual watch over the troubled nation of Haiti. Though USACOM led a successful military occupation of Haiti in 1994, political stability has yet to be achieved. As with other contingencies around the globe – in Bosnia, in Southwest Asia – creating stability requires constant U.S. military presence.

Yet Haiti is a relatively small contingency, and responsibility for the Caribbean is about to be transferred from the Atlantic Command to U.S. Southern Command. General Sheehan's responsibilities as a force provider, will continue. In this role, General Sheehan must constantly supply troops, units and equipment for other contingency operations in Bosnia, Iraq and elsewhere around the globe. He is aware of how these repeated missions are wearing down the forces he oversees. He knows the cost of people "doing more with less," how equipment maintenance is suffering, how the quality of military life is deteriorating, and how training is not what it should be.

Between them, these three officers confront the wide variety of challenges our military faces today:

- The serious regional threat,
- The larger long-term challenges of a great power rival,
- The realities of constant operations in numerous contingencies,
- And the drain on readiness in a shrinking force being asked to work harder and accomplish more.